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AUTHOR Matulis, Janet K.; Hedges, Lowell E.
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ABSTRACT

A study ascertained the educational and occupational status of Ohio 4-H alumni and, in particular, their perceptions of the impact of 4-H on their career development. The population of the study was 883 Ohio 4-H alumni from Hancock, Darke, Portage, and Licking counties who were 17- and/or 18-year-old members as of January 1, 1977, through January 1, 1979. A proportionate, stratified random sample of 275 subjects was selected from this population. An instrument developed by the researcher consisted of perceptual items concerning the impact of 4-H on career development, 4-H involvement, and educational/employment characteristics. In general, results indicated alumni felt that 4-H had much impact on their self-awareness, particularly concerning interests and abilities. They perceived 4-H as having some impact on their career awareness, exploration, and selection. Greatest impact was attributed to 4-H in general career awareness, and least impact in more specific areas of career exploration and selection. Alumni felt that 4-H had much impact on the development of general work competencies, but very little impact on the development of competencies geared toward getting a job. (YLB)

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PERCEPTIONS OF 4-H ALUMNI FROM FOUR OHIO COUNTIES CONCERNING THE IMPACT OF 4-H ON THEIR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Janet K. Matulis
The Ohio State University

and

Lowell E. Hedges
Department of Agricultural Education
204 Agricultural Administration Building
2120 Fyffe Road
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH 43210-1099
(614) 422-6671

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PERCEPTIONS OF 4-H ALUMNI FROM FOUR OHIO COUNTIES
CONCERNING THE IMPACT OF 4-H ON THEIR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the educational and occupational status of Ohio 4-H alumni and, in particular, their perceptions as to the impact of 4-H on their career development. Also, 4-H involvement characteristics were identified, and relationships were determined among educational/occupational characteristics, perceptions of 4-H impact on career development, and 4-H involvement.

Objectives

1. What are the educational and occupational characteristics of Ohio 4-H alumni?
2. What are the 4-H involvement characteristics of Ohio 4-H alumni?
3. What are the perceptions of Ohio 4-H alumni regarding the impact of 4-H on their career development?
4. What are the relationships among educational/occupational characteristics of Ohio 4-H alumni, their 4-H involvement characteristics, and their perceptions of the impact of 4-H on their career development?

Related Literature

Few studies have explored the education and/or employment status of 4-H alumni. Meyers (1978) contends that "success stories" of selected participants traditionally have been used as indicators of 4-H program efficacy, as evidenced in Thirty Years of Growth in 4-H, a 1983 follow-up study of 4-H forestry project winners in Tennessee.

Super (1957) describes self-awareness as a vital part of career development. In a national study by Brown (1982), 17-year-old 4-H members indicated that 4-H was much more helpful in discovering one's interests and abilities, than in discovering one's disinterests and weaknesses.

Calhoun and Finch (1976) identify career awareness, exploration, and selection as another phase of career development. Rockwell, Stohler, and Rudman (1984) found that 52% of Nebraska alumni felt that 4-H was influential in choosing a potential career. Brown (1982) concluded that 4-H provides opportunities in general career education, but lacks the activities to learn about specific careers, as perceived by the 4-H members in his study.

Hoyt (1978) describes the acquisition of work competencies as another important aspect of career development. Brown (1982) found that over 85% of the 17-year-old 4-H members in his national study felt that 4-H enhances responsibility, cooperation, self-confidence, and good work habits.

Methodology

This study utilized a survey research design. The frame of the study was 883 Ohio 4-H alumni from Hancock, Darke, Portage, and Licking counties who were 17- and/or 18-year-old members as of January 1, 1977 through January 1, 1979. A proportionate, stratified random sample of 275 subjects was selected from this four-county population. Although the sample was randomly selected, the accessible population from which it was drawn was chosen on the basis of a computerized 4-H membership list being available. Therefore, the results of this study can be generalized only to that population, and not to Ohio 4-H alumni in general.

The instrument utilized in this study was developed by the researcher and consisted of three sections. Part I consisted of perceptual items concerning the

impact of 4-H on career development. Parts II and III pertained to 4-H involvement and educational/employment characteristics.

To establish content validity, the instrument was reviewed by the Extension 4-H Specialist for Older Youth and the members on the graduate committee of the researcher. A pilot test revealed a Part I reliability of .916 using Cronbach's alpha. A reliability of .931 was obtained from an analysis of the sample data.

Questionnaires were mailed to the subjects on June 1, 1984. Reminder postcards were sent to subjects June 8th, and follow-up survey packets were sent June 15th. Responses of early and late respondents were compared using t-tests to estimate the perceptions and characteristics of the non-respondents.

The data were analyzed according to SPSS*. Information obtained from the demographic and perceptual items was analyzed using frequency distributions, percentages, means and standard deviations. Relationships were determined at an alpha level of .05. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to describe the correlations between interval variables; Spearman rank correlation coefficient, between ordinal and interval variables and between ordinal variables; point-biserial correlations, between nominal and interval variables; and Cramer's V statistic, between nominal and ordinal variables.

Results and Conclusions

The instrument return rate was approximately 60%. There were no significant differences between early and late respondents on any of the items. Therefore, the results obtained from the respondents were generalized to the entire sample.

Demographic Data

All of the respondents completed high school. Slightly less than one half of all respondents completed college, attended graduate school, or completed graduate school as their highest educational level. Over one-half of the respondents were students (10%) or were employed in professional (19%), clerical (14%), or service-oriented (11%) occupations. Approximately 70% of the respondents had personal, yearly incomes of less than $15,000.

Respondents were enrolled in 4-H for an average of 8.2 years and participated in an average of 3.5 career development activities. Almost 90% of the respondents served as 4-H club officers, but the majority of respondents had not been 4-H Junior Leaders. Over 90% of all respondents perceived themselves as moderately or very active as 4-H members.

Perceptions of 4-H Impact on Career Development

Self-Awareness. Four-H had much or very much impact upon their discovering things they enjoyed doing and things they did well, according to 92% and 80%, respectively, of the respondents. The mean response score for each of two items concerning discovery of things respondents did not do well and things they did not enjoy doing was approximately 3 on the 5-point scale, indicating some 4-H impact.

Career Awareness, Exploration and Selection. Over one-half of the respondents perceived that 4-H had much or very much impact upon their learning that things they enjoyed doing or things they did well could lead to a career. The mean response score was between 2.5 and 3 on the 5-point scale for the following items: expanding choosing careers, developing a sense of need to choose a career, discovering career obstacles, and acquiring career information. Over two-thirds of the respondents claimed that 4-H had very little or no impact upon their acquiring information about

their present occupations. Between 70% and 80% of the respondents disclosed that their 4-H leaders, other 4-H members, or their county 4-H agents had very little or no impact upon their career planning.

Work Competency Development. According to 75% to 90% of the respondents, 4-H had much or very much impact upon developing these work competencies: responsibility, compatibility, following directions, cooperation, working unsupervised, self-confidence, decision-making, initiative, doing things on time, and keeping records. However, 4-H had very little or no impact upon their acquiring job-interviewing skills, learning how to apply for jobs, and learning how to prepare a resume, according to 54%, 75%, and 85%, respectively, of the respondents.

In general, alumni felt that 4-H had much impact on their self-awareness, particularly concerning interests and abilities. They perceived 4-H as having some impact on their career awareness, exploration and selection. Greatest impact was attributed to 4-H in general career awareness, and least impact in more specific areas of career exploration and selection. Alumni felt that 4-H had much impact on the development of general work competencies, but very little impact on the development of competencies geared toward getting a job.

Relationships Among the Variables

Moderate, positive relationships were found between the number of 4-H career education activities in which the alumni participated and the perceived impact of 4-H on career exploration, and between the number of career education activities and the perceived 4-H impact on work competency development. A moderate positive association was revealed between the perceived 4-H activity level of the alumni and their perceptions of 4-H impact on work competency development.

Significant relationships also were observed between 28 other pairs of variables, but all of these relationships were low. All other correlations were insignificant at an alpha level of .05.

Implications

1. Four-H members should be encouraged to participate in a broad range of 4-H activities, to help them become aware of their disinterests and weaknesses as well as their interests and abilities.
2. Four-H should both continue and expand current career awareness efforts, those general prerequisites to career exploration.
3. Career exploration efforts should be expanded greatly.
4. Greater emphasis should be placed upon the acquisition of specific work competencies geared toward securing a job.

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